

My Turn

Strong At Heart effort needs inspirational leader

Elemer Magaziner

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During the introductory comments at the Strong At Heart kick-off event on June 12, I listened for the context in which the 200 or so attendees would be listing ideas about downtown Taos' future. We were told the town leaders intend for the community's wishes to guide development.

We were told that a central objective is a thriving downtown that works for everyone.

Where did this objective come from? Is it a community wish our leaders had heard? Could it be too much to expect of the downtown, forcing unacceptable tradeoffs and compromises?

What do "thriving," "works" and "everyone" mean? What picture should the 200 of us, and many more to come later, hold in our minds as we submit ideas? No doubt the eight individuals at my table had different images in mind as we brainstormed.

What is the inspiration which could unite our diverse community as it wrestles with many disquieting challenges? The absence of such inspiration is a vacuum which promptly fills with irate bickering over any proposed plan. Plans in this vacuum do not inspire, they are more prone to stir up resentment.

In the summer of 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

inspired a nation enmeshed in grave social conflict. After describing a disheartening 100 years since the Emancipation Proclamation, he declared, "I have a dream that one day [in] this nation... little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers..." and told much more that would be true in his dream of the future. Imagine, if you will, that he had instead said, I have a plan for this nation... followed by a list of steps. Would a seminal I Have a Plan speech been possible?

A few months earlier, in the fall of 1962 at Rice University, President John F.

Kennedy inspired a nation facing the daunting financial and technical challenges of gaining global leadership in manned space flight. After voicing his hope that space would become a "sea of peace" and not a "new terrifying theater of war," he declared, "We choose to go to the moon in this decade ... because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills..." Strong At Heart asks us, "How can we manage development in a way that protects our historic character, supports local businesses and grows the local economy, and contributes to the quality of life of those who live here?" A question which must be asked, but is no more inspiring than if President Kennedy had asked the nation, How can we hurl human beings into space in a way that ensures their safety?

Who will proclaim the inspiration to fill the vacuum which so readily fills with indignation, criticism and accusation? Strong At Heart reports, "Most Taose-os have concerns about the impacts of growth on Taos' tradition and smalltown feel. Unfortunately, we have yet to build consensus about what steps we can take to address our economic challenges while paying reverence to our history.

Too often, our discussions about development erupt into polarizing, unproductive debates that divide us rather than unite us."

How could it be otherwise, when a leader of our own has not yet emerged to inspire us? Building consensus about what steps to take toward leadership in space required being inspired to go to the moon.

Building consensus on what steps to take toward actualized emancipation required being inspired, in part, by envisioning black children and white children holding hands as sisters and brothers. And neither the dream about our nation, nor the goal of going to the moon were developed as shared visions by the American people. Inspiring the nation, or our community, is the distinct foundational event which creates the unity for attending to our future.

Who will come forward, with unconditional love for our town in their heart, to give us the gift: I have a dream that one day Taos ...?

Magaziner is a Taos-area resident.